

CHAPTER 5

Establishing Partnerships With Families

When schools welcome newcomer families and collaborate with them in ways that respect and value their cultures, languages, assets, aspirations, and needs, the entire community is enriched. This chapter discusses the diversity among newcomer families, as well as potential barriers to school-family partnerships and ways to overcome those barriers. It also describes essential components of strong family engagement, characteristics of quality programs, and examples of effective, collaborative, sustained, and supportive partnerships with newcomer families.

After reading this chapter, readers should be able to

- Recognize diverse characteristics of newcomer families;
- Identify ways to facilitate newcomer family engagement at their schools;
- Examine tools and approaches for establishing successful partnerships with newcomer families;
- Review professional development tools for increasing staff's capacity to communicate with and empower newcomer families; and
- Continue learning about newcomers and their families through an annotated bibliography of resources.

Who Are Newcomer Families?

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this toolkit, people leave their countries of origin for a variety of reasons.

Newcomer families want their children to thrive in school and reach their full potential. They want their children to graduate from high school and take advantage of college and career options. These families understand the value of educational assets in a global society and expect their children to leverage those assets as they enter the workforce. The National Education Association (NEA) reports that Hispanic MLs and their families indicated on national surveys education as the issue of greatest importance.¹

Newcomer Families

For the purposes of this toolkit, we will use the term “family” to identify parents or other immediate or extended family members, such as a grandparent or stepparent, with whom the child lives or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare.

Newcomer families bring strengths and assets that manifest in their children and that can positively influence academic performance and be harnessed in developing partnerships among schools, families, and communities. Although backgrounds of some newcomer families may also include traumatic and adverse experiences, well-resourced and stable environments, such as schools, can contribute to building children's strengths and talents and support positive educational outcomes.² It is, therefore, essential that schools partner with families to create environments that best facilitate their children's emotional and academic development.

Welcoming Newcomer Families

Highly successful schools spend time with families during the enrollment process to build trust and establish an understanding of engagement expectations for families. Such schools regularly communicate with families and visit with them in their homes to address challenges and opportunities. Newcomer families need specific

¹ National Education Association. (2020, June 23). *English language learners: What you need to know*.

² Shafer, L. (2018, April 26). *Partnering with newcomer families: Strategies for working across language and cultural differences to make families feel at home in new schools*. Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

information on how to support their children's learning and development as these families adapt to a new culture and, in many cases, a new language.³

It is important to remember that not all students arrive with their parents: some arrive alone, some stay with relatives, and others may be in foster homes or with a sponsor. When enrolling newcomers, the school should identify who is responsible for the students and work with families to determine their children's language proficiency.



Check out this RESOURCE

[Starting School in the United States: A Guide for Newcomer Students' Families](#) is a resource from Regional Education Laboratory, Northwest. This infographic provides information about registering and attending U.S. schools and suggests several additional resources that may be helpful to newcomer students and their families.

Did You KNOW

There was a 6 percent increase in unaccompanied minors arriving in the U.S. between 2014 and 2019, with close to 70 percent of those coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Unaccompanied minors are children who:

- Lack lawful immigration status in the U.S.,
- Are under the age of 18, and
- Are either without a parent or legal guardian in the U.S. or without a parent or legal guardian in the U.S. who is available to provide care and physical custody.

Many reasons exist for the migration of unaccompanied minors to the U.S. Some leave their native countries to escape from violence or poverty, while others seek to be reunited with family members in the U.S.

Source: Kandel, W. A. (2019). *Unaccompanied alien children: An overview*. Congressional Research Service. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homsec/R43599.pdf>

Informing Newcomer Families of Their Rights

As parents and guardians of school-age children, newcomer families have certain rights. It is very important that schools and districts inform newcomer families of their rights in a way that is accessible to them (i.e., using their home language); conveying information through channels accessible to families (e.g., making information available in ways other than solely online); utilizing mobile-friendly platforms to disseminate information; or making phone calls. For example, *Title I* of *ESEA* requires that school districts communicate to parents assessment results on statewide assessments in an understandable format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents understand. (Section 1111[b][2][B][x]).

Schools and districts should consider providing information to newcomer families about the following topics:

- Eligibility of their children to attend school in the United States.: All school-age children, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, are able to access free, public school education in the school district where they live.

³ Castellón, M., Cheuk, T., Greene, R., Mercado-Garcia, D., Santos, M., Skarin, R., & Zerkel, L. (2015, December). *Schools to learn from: How six high schools graduate English language learners college and career ready*. Stanford University, Stanford Graduate School of Education.

- Which documentation is required for school enrollment and which documentation is not necessary: For example, families may need to provide immunization records and proof of their address, but schools cannot ask for proof of citizenship status or a parent's Social Security card.
- Confidentiality of the information that families provide to the school.
- Access to and eligibility of their children for language support services and families' ability to decline these services.
- Access to and eligibility of their children for disability-related services: Under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* (Section 504), children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education, which includes disability-related services. The *IDEA*, as well as Section 504 and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* together, require that if a student is identified both as a student who needs language assistance services and as a student with a disability, the school must offer language assistance and disability-related services to the student at the same time. Disability evaluations may not be delayed because of a student's limited English proficiency. A child's English proficiency cannot be the reason for determining that the child has a disability.
- School facilities and programs, including computer labs and science labs; pre-kindergarten; magnet; career and technical education (CTE) programs; and Advanced Placement (AP), honors, and International Baccalaureate® (IB) courses, as well as counseling services and online and distance learning opportunities. Schools should provide newcomer families with information about the requirements necessary to access these programs.
- During remote learning, how to access hardware (e.g., computers) and software (e.g., programs) necessary to participate in school.
- How children, including students with disabilities, can participate in school-based programs and activities offered before, during, and after school, such as performing and visual arts, sports, clubs, and honor societies.
- Safety at school for their children: School staff, teachers, and other students cannot bully or threaten a child. For example, students or teachers cannot injure a child or destroy his or her property.
- Teachers and school staff cannot discriminate against or harass a child based on any reason, such as:
 - Wearing ethnic or religious clothes,
 - Being from another country,
 - Not being proficient in English,
 - Having a disability, or
 - A child's sex and/or gender identity.
- Their children's right to express their religious beliefs: This includes wearing religious clothing and symbols (such as a headscarf, crucifix, or yarmulke).
- Their children's eligibility for child nutrition programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, that may offer free and reduced-price meals to children most in need.⁴

⁴ The National School Lunch Program is a food and nutrition program provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>

Approaches and Practices for Engaging Newcomer Families

Identifying Newcomer MLs

One way to engage newcomer families is to identify students who may qualify for language assistance services. The most common tool used by districts as part of the identification process is the home language survey (HLS). Home language surveys are currently developed by states independently. There is, therefore, a great deal of variation in these instruments across and even within states. However, the HLS typically includes questions about what language(s) the student first learned, understands, uses, and hears, and in what contexts. Additional questions about a student's language exposure and background (e.g., languages used in the home) can help ensure students requiring language assistance services are accurately identified.

To obtain accurate information, schools may need to reassure parents that the HLS is used solely to offer appropriate educational services (e.g., to inform placement into a language assistance program), not for determining legal status or for immigration purposes. Parents and guardians should also be informed that, even if their child is identified as a student requiring language assistance services, they may decline the program or particular language assistance services in the program.



Check out this RESOURCE

[Home Language Survey Data Quality Self-Assessment](#) was developed to help SEAs and LEAs improve the quality of data collected by HLS and improve identification of students requiring language assistance services.

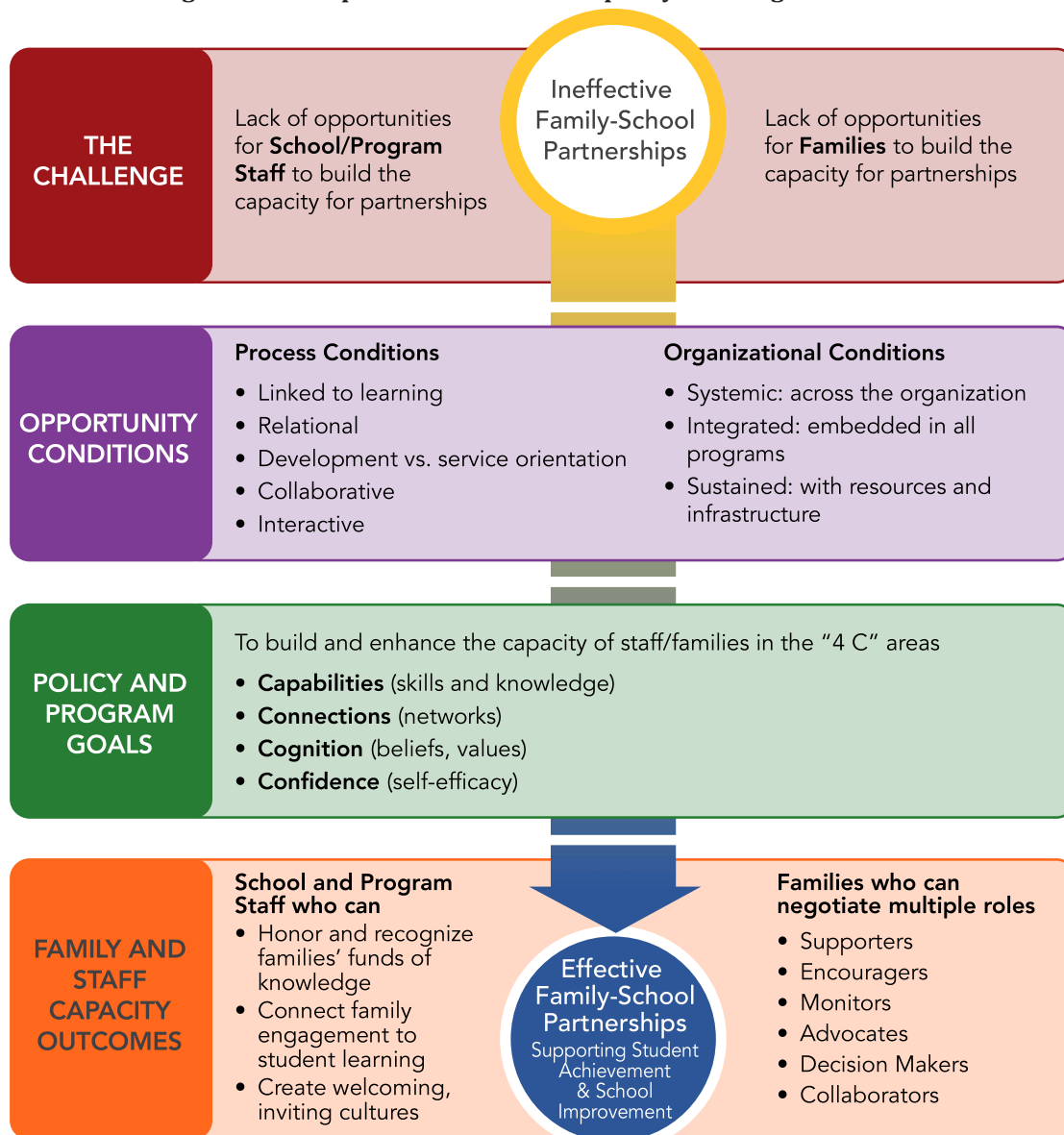
Building Partnerships Through the Dual Capacity-Building Framework

One of the challenges to effective and efficient family engagement is the limited capacity of stakeholders to partner and share responsibility for improving student achievement and performance. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework identifies the challenges, conditions, goals, and outcomes for successful school-family partnerships. The main idea behind this model is that to create and sustain partnerships, educational institutions should build capacity in their staff and families, as well as create conditions and program goals that are optimal for family engagement. The figure 5.1 demonstrates the components of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework.

Once the challenges to creating and sustaining partnerships have been identified, the framework outlines conditions that should be created to facilitate and sustain family engagement. These conditions are divided into two groups—*process* and *organizational*. Process conditions outline the processes that must take place for fruitful partnerships. For example, school-family partnerships must be linked to learning, meaning that activities aimed to engage families must be centered around academic and developmental goals for students. They must also be relational and focus on building trust between families and schools. Organizational conditions must be systemic, integrated, and sustained. Among other things, the framework recommends that capacity-building efforts for family engagement must be integrated into activities such as training and professional development for educators and administrators.⁵

⁵ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://sedl.org/pubs/framework/>

Figure 5.1. Components of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework



Note: Recreated for 508 Compliance with permission from *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*, by SEDL (in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education), 2013. www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf. Copyright 2013 by SEDL.

Policy and program goals must also be re-oriented to build and sustain successful partnerships. The framework points out that often schools and districts focus solely on providing families with training and workshops on how to engage in their children’s education, which may create tension between schools and families by placing the responsibility solely on families. Instead, it may be beneficial to build the capacity for engagement of both staff and families by following the four components of *capabilities*, *connections*, *confidence*, and *cognition*. Within the capabilities component, school staff must recognize the funds of knowledge of newcomer ML families, while families need to become knowledgeable about the U.S. school system and develop advocacy skills. The connections component emphasizes building relationships between not only schools and families, but also among families, as well as establishing connections to community organizations and agencies. The confidence component emphasizes the sense of comfort and self-efficacy that staff and families should feel in



View a [webinar](#) from the Office of English Language Acquisition on best practices and examples for continuous ML family and community engagement featuring the Dual Capacity-Building Framework.

the partnership. Within the cognition component, it is necessary for staff to value family partnerships and for families to view themselves as valuable contributors to their children's education.⁶

As a result of enhanced capacity on the part of schools and families, positive outcomes can be achieved. Staff should be able to recognize and respect families' knowledge, experiences, skills, and various forms of engagement; create and sustain environments that welcome diverse family perspectives; and develop engagement initiatives that are appropriate for all stakeholders and lead to improved developmental and academic outcomes. The outcomes for families include comfort in fulfilling various roles in supporting their children's education. These

roles include supporters, encouragers, monitors, models, advocates, decision-makers, and collaborators.

While the Dual Capacity-Building Framework is not a blueprint for engagement initiatives, if it is designed and carried out to fit the needs and contexts of educational institutions and communities, it can serve as a guide to effective partnerships that support efforts to boost student achievement and improve schools.

Addressing Barriers to School–Newcomer Family Partnerships

The culture of U.S. schools and the expectations for family engagement may be new to some newcomer families. In their home countries some families may not have collaborated with schools closely and actively because such action may have been viewed as interfering with professionals. In the United States, on the other hand, family engagement is often expected to be explicitly school-based and visible to educators, such as volunteering in the classroom or regularly initiating contact with teachers.⁷

For example, families of children in U.S. schools are encouraged to

- Advocate for their children and school;
- Encourage their children's achievement, positive behaviors, persistence, and active participation in learning and school activities;

Ensure that their children attend school every day and are ready to learn;

- Communicate with the school about absences and any special circumstances affecting the student; and
- Collaborate, volunteer, and engage in decision-making to improve the quality of the school.

Schools should develop strategies to explicitly communicate about and facilitate collaboration with newcomer families. In addition, families may need support in building their capacity to engage productively in school-family partnerships.⁸ Research shows that students thrive when schools and parents establish partnerships



Review this [blog](#) to learn more about how to incorporate student and family voice to build and sustain relationship with diverse families and communities.

⁶ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://sedl.org/pubs/framework/>

⁷ Protacio, M. S., Piazza, S. V., & David, V. (2021). *Family engagement in the middle: Reaching out to families of English learners*. *Middle School Journal*, 52(1), 30–39.

⁸ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

that focus on student achievement and school improvement, shared responsibility, trust building, and respectful home-school relationships.⁹

Schools may need to explicitly reach out to newcomer families to establish and support two-way communication. Newcomer families need to know that their voices count, and they need to learn how to be heard in the school. The school can link parents to adult education opportunities, as well as social and cultural resources. School leaders can organize family engagement events that improve the newcomer's transition, taking into consideration the multiple challenges and opportunities newcomer students and their families may be experiencing in the United States. When parents come to the school for events such as student performances and parent-teacher conferences, schools can introduce these families to the wealth of resources the school offers and explain how they can be used to support children's academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. Schools should also encourage families to avail themselves of community resources that are free and open to all.

Transportation, busy work schedules, childcare, racism, or intimidation based on legal status may be challenges to parent engagement.¹⁰ Other factors can also hinder parents' full participation in their child's education. Some newcomer families' work schedules may make it difficult for them to attend school functions. Research has indicated that home visiting programs such as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY) increased immigrant family engagement in their children's education.

Schools should carefully and respectfully offer suggestions about supports available to help families with sensitive issues such as trauma, domestic violence, health, nutrition, food, social support, and disability. An understanding of the values and cultural norms of the newcomer will help schools become effective resource brokers and help families thrive.

A 2018 study that analyzed a nationally representative 10th-grade data set from the National Center for Educational Statistics found that teachers' perceptions of parental engagement and support differed for families of various racial and ethnic groups, as well as their generational status (e.g., students classified as first-generation immigrants versus third-generation immigrants).¹¹ For example, in general, English and math teachers perceived minority families, such as Hispanic and Asian, as less involved in their children's education. Teachers also perceived families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as less engaged. The results of this study also show that teacher perceptions may be reflected in students' achievement and opportunities. Students whose families are perceived by teachers as disengaged or not involved in their children's education seem to have lower GPAs than the students whose families are perceived by teachers to be actively engaged. Teachers are also less likely to recommend for honors or advanced coursework and academic honors those students whose families they believe to be less engaged than their peers with similar academic performance.

While schools may need to support newcomer families in taking an active role in their children's education, they should also learn about, acknowledge, and value the less visible support that families provide to their children outside of school. Schools and districts may consider addressing racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes that may exist in their educational communities.

⁹ Sibley, E., & Brabeck, K. (2017). Latino immigrant students' school experiences in the United States: [The importance of family-school-community collaborations](#). *School Community Journal*, 27(1).

¹⁰ Arias, M. B., & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008). [Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times](#) [Policy brief]. Arizona State University, College of Education, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Education Policy Research Unit.

¹¹ Ho, P., & Cherng, H. S. (2018). [How far can the apple fall? Differences in teacher perceptions of minority and immigrant parents and their impact on academic outcomes](#). *Social Science Research*, 74, 132–145.

Empowering Newcomer Families to Engage With Schools

High-quality newcomer family engagement programs start with attention to the strengths and needs of families who send their children to school and aim to empower families with the knowledge and skills they need to support their children's academic success. When schools empower families, they can maximize learning not only at school, but also outside of school hours, where students spend most of their time.¹² As part of empowering newcomer families, schools should encourage families to ask questions and seek information about a variety of topics regarding the U.S. educational system, including families' rights that are discussed earlier in this chapter. These topics may include the following:

- Enrollment processes and procedures
- School policies
 - Attendance
 - Uniforms
 - Absences
 - Homework
 - Grades/advancement
- Educational programs and services
 - Tutoring
 - Advanced, honors, and International Baccalaureate® courses
 - Language assistance programs/language instruction educational programs
 - Disability-related services
 - Individualized instructional plans
 - Gifted and talented education programs
 - Dual language/bilingual programs
 - Online/distance/virtual learning
 - Summer intersession programs
 - Before- and after-school care programs
 - Access to devices and internet
- Extracurricular activities
 - School clubs and after-school activities
 - Sports/art/music/theater programs
- Health and safety
 - Bullying policies
 - Policies against discrimination
 - Confidentiality
 - Social and emotional well-being/mental health
 - Access to affordable medical and dental services
 - Nutritional services
 - Medications and nutritional/medical accommodations



¹² Arias, M. B., & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008, January). *Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times* [Policy brief]. Arizona State University, College of Education, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Education Policy Research Unit.; National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (n.d). *Family involvement in elementary school children's education*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools.

Impact of COVID-19 on Newcomer Students and Families

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the academic achievement and social and emotional well-being of MLs, newcomers, their families, and communities. Newcomers, MLs, and their families may have been affected by the pandemic in the following ways:

Economy, Community, and Society

ML and newcomer families are likely to have experienced the biggest economic and social impacts of the pandemic due to

- Family members being essential workers,
- Family members losing jobs, and
- Increased discrimination because of their ethnicity.

Physical and Mental Health

ML and newcomer families are most likely to live in the communities that have been hit the hardest by COVID-19 and experience lack of equitable access to health care. This may have had the following consequences on their physical and mental health:

- Vulnerability to COVID-19 infection
- Hesitancy to seek medical and mental health services
- Barriers to diagnosing and treating mental health issues
- Scarcity of culturally competent mental health care options
- Grief and shock at losing family and community members to illness
- Increased feelings of anxiety and isolation
- Re-emergence of traumatic memories

Research indicates that supportive learning environments and conditions can help overcome the negative effects of adverse experiences such as those that newcomer and ML families have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools and districts should take action to support students and families in the following ways:

- Implement **district- and schoolwide approaches** to meeting the mental health needs of students and families.
- Conduct student and family **needs assessments** regarding physical and mental health, financial security, child care, etc.
- **Talk** about mental health to students and their families.
- Provide students opportunities to **speak openly** about their lives, stressors, anxiety, etc.
- Let students and families know that they are not alone and allow **time to heal**.
- Build **community partnerships** to strengthen relationships with newcomer and ML families.
- **Strengthen** existing relationships and develop new ones with community-based organizations.

Sources:

Browning, A. (2020). *Mindfulness in education: An approach to cultivating self-awareness that can bolster kids' learning*. Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd.

Garcia-Arena, P., & D'Souza, S. (2020, October). *Research brief: Spotlight on English learners*. American Institutes for Research.

Holquist, S., & Porter, T. (2020, June 3). *Culturally responsive leading and learning: Addressing equity through student and family voice*. Institute of Education Sciences, [National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/blogs/blog27_culturally-responsive-leading-and-learning_addressing-equity.asp), Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/blogs/blog27_culturally-responsive-leading-and-learning_addressing-equity.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2020). *ED COVID-19 handbook: Roadmap to reopening safely and meeting all students' needs*. Volume 2. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf>

For more information on social, emotional, and mental health support for newcomers and their families, please refer to Chapter 3 of this toolkit.

Processes and Strategies to Create Partnerships With Newcomer Families and Facilitate Family Engagement

The following table suggests five processes schools can utilize to engage newcomer families effectively. The five processes are (1) collaboration among school staff, families, and community members; (2) development of staff and newcomers' capacities to re-envision their roles and take actions that support student success; (3) acknowledgement of newcomers' assets and focus on how they can strengthen the school; (4) employment of a multi-pronged approach to communicating with families and providing language supports, such as interpreters and translated materials; and (5) incorporation of family engagement as a standard part of the school's continuous improvement efforts.

Processes	Strategies
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Examine assumptions and cultural biases, recognize and employ newcomer families' assets, bring family voices into planning for their children and the school's success, and craft multi-modal informational resources on everything families need to know and do. ■ Bring newcomer families and staff together to co-construct meaningful communications and resources for families and to collaborate in the delivery of learning and support activities for families.¹³ ■ Encourage and help parents develop leadership skills to participate in decision-making throughout the school and the community. ■ Enlist newcomer families to design and conduct family learning opportunities on parenting across cultures, promoting child development, supporting learning, and planning for college and careers.
Capacity Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build newcomers and staff members' capacity to effectively carry out multiple roles (advocate, supporter, encourager, decision-maker, etc.). ■ Build staff capacity to challenge deficit mindsets related to traditional expectations for newcomers and encourage an asset orientation.¹⁴ ■ Create parent and family welcome kits with information about the school. Include families and students' responsibilities, school schedules, phone numbers, procedures, and any other information that will help families feel welcome, informed, and integrated into the school. ■ Sponsor and encourage families to attend family literacy events where families and/or students can engage in academic activities together.
Assets Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish opportunities for listening to families and strive to meet high expectations, aspirations, and hopes by drawing on newcomers' cultures, languages, funds of knowledge, and skills. ■ Acknowledge and value multiple formats of family engagement, including the ones not readily visible at the school. ■ Encourage staff to recognize and acknowledge the value that newcomer families place on their children's education. ■ Incorporate the strengths of families and the community in the school curriculum.

¹³ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

¹⁴ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

Processes	Strategies
Multi-Modal Communications and Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use multiple methods to communicate (e.g., newsletters translated in the languages represented in the school, telephone trees, a school website, parent outreach workers, and other structures). ■ Conduct newcomer focus groups and/or newcomer advisory committees to get input on decision-making structures, concerns, questions, and recommendations. ■ Ensure that language supports are available for all educational communications and activities. ■ Use suggestion boxes, surveys, targeted and short interviews, and/or polling with the appropriate language supports to encourage newcomer families to voice their concerns and ideas to inform school planning. ■ Learn about newcomer families' familiarity with and availability of technological devices and the internet. ■ If necessary, provide training and support for using technology and navigating online school and district resources and information.
Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify strategies to give newcomer families opportunities to enrich the school community's culture by sharing their personal and cultural assets.¹⁵ ■ Continuously improve family engagement by examining multiple data sources to assess the impact of policies and practices on newcomers. ■ Include newcomer families' values and perspectives to promote cross-cultural understanding and strengthen their 21st-century skills through volunteer experiences they can engage in.



Check out this RESOURCE

Access the [Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program](#) page from the U.S. Department of Education. This program provides support organizations that assist SEAs and LEAs in implementation and enhancement of effective family engagement policies.

Special Considerations for Family Engagement in Secondary Schools

Secondary schools should be aware of the diverse needs, challenges, and aspirations of newcomer students and families as they strive to help them understand the various pathways to graduation and the relative advantages of the options available to high school students.¹⁶ Newcomer parents may need help developing the knowledge and skills to advocate for their child's inclusion in extracurricular activities, college preparation programs, career pathway counseling, AP classes, and concurrent enrollment courses. They may also need information on the following topics: adolescent development, warning signs of gang affiliation, identifying and responding to drug use, financial aid for college, college exploration, and filling out application forms for college and financial aid. High schools can include such



¹⁵ Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

¹⁶ National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2021). *English learners in secondary schools: Trajectories, transition points, and promising practices* [Webinar]. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/Webinars>; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2021). *English Learners in secondary schools: Trajectories, transition points, and promising practices, parts I & II* [Podcast]. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/oela-resources/podcasts>

topics in their newcomer family education programs. In addition, schools can support families and newcomers by developing individual graduation plans that are regularly reviewed with counselors to ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.



Check out these RESOURCES

- Access a [webinar](#) with the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Outreach Specialist to learn about FAFSA® updates and new tools and resources from FSA that can help students and their families prepare and pay for college or a career school.
- Review [Developing Educator Expertise to Work with Adolescent English Learners](#) learning modules from the National Research & Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners. These modules were developed based on the expertise of researchers and educators from around the world and can serve as resources for preservice teachers, as well as continuing education activities for in-service educators.



Ideas in ACTION

Protacio et al. (2021) present examples of adjustments made at three middle schools by teachers and staff that resulted in improved school-family partnerships and increased ML family engagement.

- **Example 1:** One school changed a poorly attended Open House event into a Diversity Night and provided families with the space and agency to share about their cultures. Students shared funds of knowledge posters about their cultures. The event had a higher attendance rate than the Open House, and families who completed a survey about the event were highly satisfied with it.
- **Example 2:** A middle school ESL teacher improved outreach to ML families by providing invitations for parent-teacher conferences (PTC) in families' native languages. The teacher also hired interpreters who accompanied families to meetings with general education teachers. This resulted in 100 percent PTC attendance by ML families, as well as the recognition by other teachers, who had previously held deficit beliefs, of the value ML families place on their children's education.
- **Example 3:** A health teacher encouraged MLs to indicate on a map where their families came from. Students also made videos about their countries. During PTCs, the teacher displayed the map in her room and played student-made videos on the computer. As families arrived at PTCs, they were asked to tell a story about their countries and cultures. This generated interest and engagement from families, teachers, and students, and helped families feel safe and welcome at the school.

These three examples demonstrate that even small changes can result in positive steps towards engagement and partnerships among secondary schools, MLs, and their families.

Source: Protacio, M. S., Piazza, S. V., & David, V. (2021). Family engagement in the middle: Reaching out to families of English learners. *Middle School Journal* 52(1), 30–39.

Core Components of Family Engagement Programs

When designing family engagement programs for newcomers, schools may wish to consider these three goals for family participation:

1. **Academic Success:** Strengthen newcomer families' capacity to support academic achievement by increasing their awareness of instructional programs and ways they can support their child's learning.
2. **Advocacy and Decision-Making:** Strengthen families' understanding of how to advocate for their child and how to participate in decisions to improve learning for their child and for others in the school
3. **Awareness and Use of Resources:** Strengthen families' awareness of resources available in the school and community and how to access these resources to support their family's well-being and their own personal growth.

The Important Role of Family Centers

Family centers provide valuable tools for engaging and supporting newcomer students' families. A thoughtfully designed center can do the following things:

Welcome Newcomer Families

A family center can provide a welcoming place within the school for all families. Families should be informed about the center and its purpose. They need to know that it is a place they can get information about the school and the community, feel safe asking questions, and meet other families. Those who staff the center—usually a parent coordinator or volunteer—should be informed about the special needs of newcomer families and ways the center can make newcomer families feel welcome and comfortable. Immigrant families and interpreters should be part of the center staff.

Serve as a Hub for Information and Communications

The family center staff can introduce newcomer families to the center and provide orientation materials, such as a fact sheet about the school. Families should be informed that centers are places where parents can gather to learn, share resources about external and internal opportunities for learning, exchange expertise, and connect with school and community resources. Family centers should provide up-to-date information about employment opportunities, medical and dental services, food and nutrition assistance programs, and citizenship applications. Family centers often offer a variety of classes, based on families' needs and interests.



Check out this
RESOURCE

See [Partnering for Success with Newcomer Students and Families](#) from the Aurora Public Schools Welcome Center to learn more about how one school district is supporting newcomer students and families in their transition to U.S. schools.

Model and Support Families' Engagement With Their Children's Learning

Family centers can help identify learning opportunities at home and help families take advantage of museums, libraries, parks, and other resources in the community. Centers often sponsor classes to introduce families with young children to early literacy activities in the language the family feels most comfortable speaking. The children will benefit from reading materials in their home language, and the newcomer family members can become familiar with various cultures by discussing ideas, exploring characters in fiction, and being introduced to new perspectives. Staff in the center may model and teach questioning and engagement strategies that families can use to facilitate their children's learning at home. Families should be encouraged to monitor their children's reading and to talk about text every day; centers can empower families by building their capacity to do so in the children's home language. Finally, centers should make sure that translators are present, so they can translate the information in families' home languages.

Provide Disability-Related Resources

Family resource centers, including Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), provide resources to families who have children with disabilities. They can provide information about the disability or disabilities of the child, early intervention services, school services, therapy, transportation, and additional resources that are available. CPRCs may have some additional resources, as they are designed to reach underserved children with disabilities, including those who are MLs. Having a child with a disability may carry a cultural stigma for some newcomers, and family resource centers can provide supports and help families navigate the special education process within the U.S. school system.

Provide Access to Technology and Digital Support

Family centers provide opportunities for families to use technological resources. Research has found that many immigrant families have mobile-only access (i.e., cell phones) and no home access (no laptop or desktop computer and no internet connection).¹⁷ Center staff should be aware of newcomer families' access, skills, and attitudes related to technology:

- The main reason some families do not have home computers or internet access is because they cannot afford it.
- Parents use the internet for a broad range of purposes, but mobile-only families are less likely to do certain online activities.
- Children from low- and moderate-income families use computers and the internet for a variety of educational activities, but those without home access are less likely to go online to pursue their interests.
- Families feel largely positive about the internet and digital technology, but many also have concerns about inappropriate content online, distractions from important activities, online bullying, and the possibility that classroom technology might be a distraction that hurts children's education.
- Children and parents frequently learn with and about technology together, especially in families with the lowest incomes and where parents have less formal education.



The Office of Educational Technology's [Advancing Digital Equity for All: Community-Based Recommendations for Developing Effective Digital Equity Plans to Close the Digital Divide and Enable Technology-Empowered Learning](#) resource identifies barriers to broadband and technology access and strategies for navigating those barriers for learner communities furthest from digital opportunities, including ELs and highly mobile learners. The resource additionally highlights examples of communities and organizations implementing strategies to close the digital divide.

Family centers can be good places to build meaningful and equitable digital skills and connections for all families. Schools' outreach to parents when adopting new digital learning platforms—specifically how a district promotes the program to families and how programs respond to parents' needs and concerns—is also critical to maintaining families' trust.

In schools without family centers, teachers and administrators may wish to explore other practical and easily accessible and sustainable places to support families' digital use. For example, partnerships with libraries and public-private ventures may help families gain access to the internet or to devices that are pre-loaded with

¹⁷ Rideout, V., & Katz, V. S. (2016). [Opportunity for all? Technology and learning in lower-income families](#). The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

data. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the need for digital skills and access to the internet, and schools should be mindful of newcomer families' capabilities with technology prior to adopting new platforms and tools.¹⁸ Regardless of whether a school or a district has a family center, newcomer families should be provided with training and support in using technology, as well as assistance in accessing devices and a reliable internet connection.

Resources From the Field: Innovative Newcomer Support

Below are some resources on effectively and efficiently supporting newcomer MLs that include engaging their families. These resources may spark ideas for your school. See the second schoolwide tool at the end of this chapter for additional examples from the field.

Global Family Research Project

The Global Family Research Project is the successor to the Harvard Family Research Project (1983-2016). The project has an excellent track record in defining and advancing the fields of family, school, and community engagement. Resources of the project include blogs and resources on various aspects of family engagement in the context of preK–12 education.

Engaging Newcomer Families: Examples From the Field

These examples demonstrate a wide range of approaches schools, districts, and communities can take to engage newcomer families. Use them to help your school staff gain insight and inspiration.

Example 1: Engaging Families in Decision-Making (California). A quarter of the students in the Alhambra Unified Schools District in California, arrived in the United States fewer than three years ago from various parts of the world. The district engaged families in decision-making as part of a Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative. This initiative focuses on helping students, teachers, families, and others work together on education and health issues. To this end, the SS/HS Initiative created an ethnically diverse parent advisory board to provide a forum for family concerns. SS/HS staff worked with the schools to identify a variety of families, not just community leaders. Forty families joined the advisory board; many came as couples, demonstrating their commitment to their children's success. To reach out to immigrants, every flyer, poster, and communication material is translated into Cantonese, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and at every meeting, translations of speakers' comments are provided via headphones.

Example 2: Family Resources at Franklin-McKinley School District (California) . Parent Resources in the Franklin-McKinley School District in San Jose, California, offer parents a range of learning opportunities. These include parent workshops and support, immigration services and resources, anti-bullying information, information on children's health and nutrition, etc. The district also houses the Family Resource Center that, among other things, provides families with resources for basic needs, such as clothing, food distribution, school supplies, adult education, etc.

Example 3: Family Resources at South Gate High School (California). South Gate High School (SGHS) serves a predominantly Latina/o student population. The school website contains a section dedicated entirely to family resources. They include a request for technology help, mental health support resources, information about family workshops, and a link to the district Parent Portal and other resources. Almost all information, including forms that are available through the family resources page, is available in English and in Spanish.

¹⁸ National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2020). [Engaging English learner communities and families through distance learning](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-748/pdf/COMPS-748.pdf). U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition.

Example 4: Immigrant Services at Newcomer Community Service Center (Washington, D.C.). The Newcomer Community Service Center (NCSC) is a nonprofit organization that helps refugees and immigrants from all countries become self-sufficient and participating members of American society. Founded in 1978 as the Indochinese Community Center, NCSC uses the following strategies to achieve its mission:

- Helping refugees and immigrants achieve economic self-sufficiency
- Helping refugees and immigrants maintain their legal immigration status
- Communicating to public and private agencies about newcomers' needs for education, health, employment, and other services
- Respecting diverse cultures and supporting cultural preservation activities

The center offers to newcomer immigrants services in the area of immigration support case management and provides referral services to such resources as translation and interpretation, English as a Second Language courses, vocational training, etc.

Assessing Family–School–Community Partnerships

Multiple data sources and data-gathering processes, such as interviews, focus groups, and informal conversations, can help identify what is working for families.¹⁹ Once a vision and framework for newcomer family engagement are in place, their effectiveness needs to be assessed. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction offers the following tool to help schools better understand how they are supporting family-school-community partnerships, with attention to six types of partnerships highlighted by the work of Joyce Epstein.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Measuring Your Family–School–Community Partnerships: A Tool for Schools

How does your school reach out to and involve families and the community in children's learning?

This tool is based on the six types of partnerships: (1) parenting and family skills, (2) communicating, (3) learning at home, (4) volunteering, (5) decision-making, and (6) community collaboration. It may help your school do the following three things to implement the partnerships effectively:

4. Assess the strength of the partnerships it conducts
5. Indicate the focus or direction of your partnerships
6. Identify areas that can be changed

Your school may do all, some, or none of the activities or approaches listed above. Not every activity is appropriate for every grade level. The items listed were selected because it has been shown that schools in which they take place are meeting the challenge to involve families in many different ways. These activities can improve school climate, strengthen families, and increase student learning. Your school may also be conducting other activities. Be sure to add them under each type of engagement and include them in your school's assessment of its key partnership practices.

¹⁹ Castellón, M., Cheuk, T., Greene, R., Mercado-Garcia, D., Santos, M., Skarin, R., & Zerkel, L. (2015, December). *Schools to learn from: How six high schools graduate English language learners college and career ready*. Stanford University, Stanford Graduate School of Education.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY

Purpose

This exercise will help your school team build a common understanding of the core components of strong family engagement programs for newcomers (academic success, advocacy and decision-making, and awareness and use of resources) and reflect on your school's practices related to each component.²⁰ It includes a template to help organize your team's thinking and planning.

The
Three A's:
Academics, Advocacy,
and Awareness
**CORE COMPONENTS
OF STRONG FAMILY
ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAMS**
(PLANNING TOOL)

Materials

- Poster or handout of the three A's
- Handouts A and B
- Flip chart or whiteboard

Time Required for Activity

- 1 hour

Preparation for Facilitator

- A few days in advance, ask participants to read Chapter 5 of this toolkit.
- Make a poster (or handout) that displays the three A's of strong family engagement programs.
- Make copies of handouts A and B (one of each for each participant). Handouts are found on page 96–98.

Instructions for Facilitator

Step 1: Individual Reflection on Core Components

Distribute handout A and instruct participants as follows: "This handout presents three core components (focus points) of strong family engagement programs that influence newcomer families' experiences with schooling in the United States. It describes each component and summarizes the potential impact of well-designed activities for families in each of these focus areas. The handout also describes effective delivery methods for each area of support and, ultimately, who needs to share the responsibility for engaging families. Take a few minutes to study the chart and underline areas that you think our school is not currently attending to and circle areas that are being addressed in our school, particularly with regard to newcomer families." (Allow about 10 minutes for individual reflection.)

Step 2: Group Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion to make participants' thinking visible to the group. You might want to record main ideas on a flip chart or whiteboard. (Allow 5-10 minutes for discussion.)

²⁰ Ambroso, E., Dunn, L., & Fox, P. (2021, September). *Research in brief: Engaging and empowering diverse and underserved families in schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/west/pdf/Family_Engagement_and_Empowerment_Brief_Final_Clean_ADA_Final.pdf

Step 3: Preparation for Planning Activity

Distribute handout B and instruct participants as follows: “We will use this template to plan ways our school can address engagement of newcomer families in the coming year. Based on the exercise and discussion we have just completed and on what you know about research on effective parent engagement programs, jot down five things you think are priorities for our school. These should be actions you think our school absolutely must address. They can include aspects we are currently addressing, as well as aspects you think we should start addressing.” (Allow about 3–5 minutes for individual reflection.)

Step 4: Group Planning Activity

Facilitate a group process for coming to consensus on priorities to include in your school’s family engagement plan. Record the priorities and make sure they are used to inform your school’s planning for the coming year.

The Three A’s (Core Components) of Family Engagement Programs for Newcomers

When school communities design family engagement programs for newcomers, they should consider including in their plans three core components or areas of focus:

1. **Academic Success:** strengthening newcomer families’ capacity to support academic achievement by increasing their awareness of instructional programs and ways they can support their child’s learning
2. **Advocacy and Decision-Making:** strengthening families’ understanding of how to advocate for their own child and participate in decisions to improve learning for their child and others in the school
3. **Awareness and Use of Resources:** strengthening families’ awareness of resources available in the school and community and how to access them to support their family’s well-being, as well as their own personal growth

HANDOUT A:

Organizing Family and Community Engagement for Impact

Component 1 Academic Success	Component 2 Advocacy and Decision-Making	Component 3 Awareness and Use of Resources
<i>Opportunities for engagement:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly linked to student grade-level learning goals • About two-way communication and collaboration with teachers and school leaders 	<i>Opportunities for engagement:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related to school academic and nonacademic programming • Connected to exercising advocacy and shared decision-making • About successful transitions 	<i>Opportunities for engagement:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to social services • Connected to adult education • About information and access to school and community resources
Impact (why)	Impact (why)	Impact (why)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family knowledge and understanding of key grade-level learning concepts • Greater ability to apply strategies that support grade-level learning concepts • anywhere and anytime • Strong collaboration between teachers and families • Higher expectations for learning and achievement • Improved student achievement, attendance, and behavior • Family ability and access to monitor progress regularly • Increased interaction with learning between families and their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased family participation in the life of the school community through organized meetings, groups, and committees • Increased knowledge and understanding about families' rights and responsibilities • More families as thought partners for district and school improvement • Access to academic and nonacademic resources and after-school programs • Better understanding of curriculum, academic standards, and benchmarks • Knowledge of district and school vision, mission, and policies • More volunteers supporting the school and all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of partnerships with specialized community organizations • Greater selection of services and resources for families throughout the community • Increased number of academic and nonacademic opportunities for children beyond the school day • Efficient and effective use of fiscal and human resources across the community • An increased number of community organizations engaged in supporting district and school goals
Approach (how)	Approach (how)	Approach (how)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing professional learning opportunities for school leaders, teachers, and support staff • Systematic application of research and evidence-based practices in engagements • Personal outreach by teachers • Integration of family engagement into the fabric of teaching and learning • Effective and targeted use of time and human and fiscal resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal invitations • Coordinated parent and family orientation that includes transition years, academic milestones, and college and career readiness • Quarterly newsletter • Structured and targeted open house events • Welcome centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A district/school strategic plan for community partnerships that targets the needs of the school community • An organized family and community engagement leadership team that meets regularly and includes partners across service areas • Marketing
People Responsible (who)	People Responsible (who)	People Responsible (who)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District/school leadership team • Teachers • Parents and families • Support staff • Family and Community Engagement (FACE) coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District/school leadership team • Family and Community Engagement (FACE) coordinators • Title I staff • Volunteers • Front office staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic community partners • Volunteers • Family and Community Engagement (FACE) coordinators • District leadership

HANDOUT B:

Planning Template for Addressing the Three Core Components of Strong Family Engagement Programs

	Component 1 Academic Success	Component 2 Advocacy and Decision-Making	Component 3 Awareness and Use of Resources
What do newcomer families and staff need to know?			
How will you assess their needs?			
What will be the focus of engagement activities?			
What assets do the families and staff have that can be leveraged?			
Who will be involved in planning the engagement activities?			
How will you create a safe and welcoming environment for participants?			
What capacities need to be developed or strengthened for families and staff to improve the impact of the engagements?			
How will the required capacities be developed for both families and staff?			

	Component 1 Academic Success	Component 2 Advocacy and Decision-Making	Component 3 Awareness and Use of Resources
What resources and structures will be used to recruit participants?			
What resources and structures will be used to have strong engagements and communications?			
What is the expected impact of activities?			
How will the impact be measured?			

Remote Format Adaptation

This activity can be conducted in a virtual format on a virtual platform. When implementing this activity remotely, the facilitator can provide the poster with the “three A’s” and the two handouts to the participants through email or a shared document. Participants can indicate their opinions on handout A by highlighting them in different colors.

After participants come together and share what they indicated on handout A, the facilitator can share a document while jotting down the ideas that participants are voicing. Participants can describe their ideas on the three A’s. The facilitator can use polling with multiple-choice options or true-false items on the three A’s.

Next, the facilitator gives the group a few minutes to work on handout B, then assigns participants into breakout rooms to work in small groups on coming up with an effective family engagement plan. Once small groups have concluded their discussions, the participants can return to the main group to share their plans.

Resources

The resources below have been selected based on the following criteria:

- Resource produced by a federally funded study or center
- Resource produced by an open access and peer-reviewed journal
- Resource produced by a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization

Hoffman, L., Suh, E., & Zollman, A. (2021). [What STEM teachers need to know and do to engage families of emergent multilingual students \(English language learners\)](#). *Journal of STEM Teacher Education*, 56(1), 1–15.

This article lays out an argument for STEM teacher educators to explicitly address multilingual family engagement as a key part of STEM education.

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2018). *English learner family toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/family-toolkit>

The first two chapters of this toolkit provide information for immigrant families on enrolling their children in U.S. schools and what their children can expect while attending school. Additional chapters will be added to the toolkit.

Protacio, S., Piazza, S. V., David, V., Tigchelaar, M. (2020). [Elementary teachers' initiatives in engaging families of English learners](#). *School Community Journal*, 30(2), 211–228.

This article describes authentic examples of initiatives targeting family engagement of ML families in several linguistically diverse districts in the Midwest.

Regional Educational Laboratory Program. (n.d.). *Joyful reading and writing with young children*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/Resources/JoyfulReading>

The resources on this website share practical strategies for teachers to promote joyful reading experiences and support language and literacy development for multilingual learners.